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Family life:
teenagers take their turn in sharing

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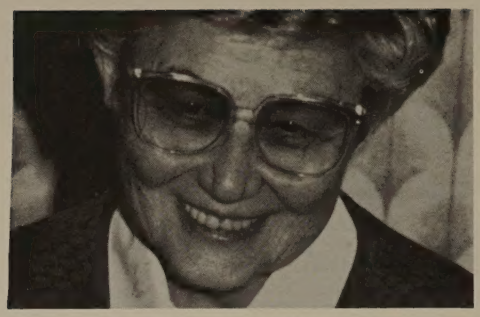

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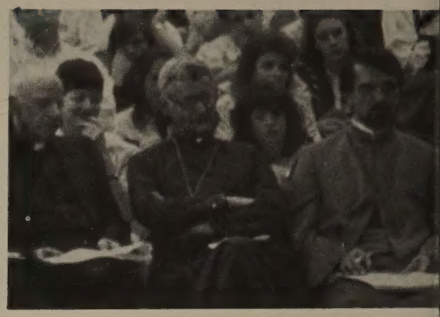

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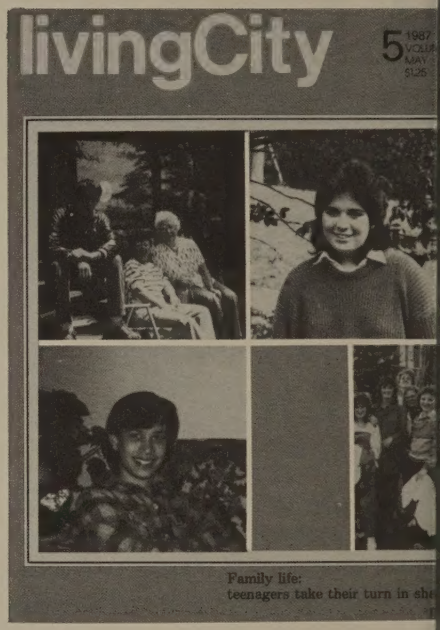

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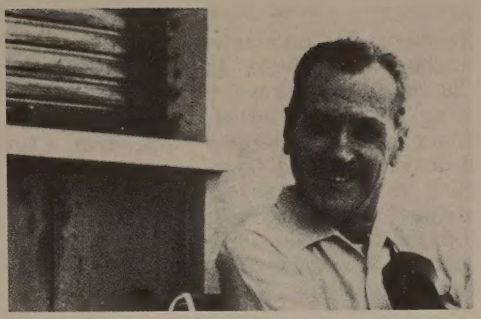
FAMILY LIFE: the challenge of a special moment: teenagers take their turn.



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All that God wills or permits is for our good

Everything that God asked of us[1] was love. In each moment he came to us in his will; and whether this appeared beautiful or sad to us, it was nonetheless he himself coming to us with his love.

But how were we to consider the things he merely allowed to happen? What about our mistakes, our weaknesses? From the very beginning, Catherine of Siena was an encouragement to us in this regard, with her statement, "All that God wills or permits is for our sanctification."

So we knew we should never let anything stop us. If we made a mistake, we could not let it get us down. Whatever happened, if entrusted to God's mercy, would not only cease to be useless or harmful, but would help us to acquire humility, which is the foundation for sanctity.

In fact, Scripture says, "God makes all things work together for the good of those who love him" (Rom 8:28). We had wanted to love God, and we discovered that, as a result, everything that happened in life would contribute to our personal spiritual growth.

As we strove to do God's will, the Holy Spirit soon taught us that it was good to do the good that God wanted, but it was bad to do the good that God did not want. This understanding made our new life more dynamic.

Doing God's will with all our heart, with all our mind and with all our strength brought us great peace and deep joy—peace and joy that the world cannot give but that only God can bestow.

Outside of God's will we found no light, no love, no peace—only torment.

Thus we learned to distinguish between natural and supernatural life. Even before then we had possessed supernatural life and God's grace, but we had not done enough to make this divine life bear fruit. Even though we were baptized we practically lived like pagans, because our hearts and minds were attached to many things instead of to God alone.

In living according to God's will we also came to a deeper understanding of Mary. We admired her as the most perfect creature who had ever lived on this earth, because she had done only God's will.

Therefore, if doing God's will meant "to live as Jesus," it also meant "to live like Mary": this was the best way to show our devotion to her and to be her children. We took as our own her words, "I am the servant of the Lord. Let it be done to me as you say" (Lk 1:38).

CHIARA LUBICH

This reflection is taken from the book, "Our Yes to God" by Chiara Lubich and published by New City Press, 1981, pages 47-49.

1) Here Chiara Lubich is referring to their experience at the very beginning of the Movement.

"Centro Uno" 25 years for Christian Unity

by Gabriella Fallacara

Since May 1961 the ecumenical center of the Focolare has worked consistently for Christian unity. Gabriella Fallacara, the present director of Centro Uno and member of the Secretariat for Ecumenism and Dialogue of the Italian Bishops Conference, tells us about the Center.

The 25th anniversary of Centro Uno, the ecumenical secretariat of the Focolare Movement, passed relatively unobserved, pretty much like when one is young and birthdays are quickly and simply celebrated. Other events had come to the fore: the inauguration of the ecumenical Mariapolis Center "Word of Life" in Trent, Italy, of the ecumenical little city, Mariapolis Luminosa in Hyde Park, New York in September, of the Center for Unity at Welwyn Garden City near London in November. These events and the publication (also in 1986) of the book of Edwin Robertson, Baptist minister and ecumenist, on Igino Giordani, the director of Centro Uno from its very beginning until 1980, are all related to Centro Uno. They reflect the ecumenical spirit present in the Movement which has developed to the point of expressing itself in communities, houses, centers and "little cities." However, people remembered it, important people such as the Ecumenical Patriarch Demetrios I of the Greek Orthodox Church who wrote from Istanbul: *"I have closely followed the work and the dy-* ►

namism of Centro Uno in the life of our Roman Catholic sister-Church, its work with all the faithful in Christ toward the final objective of unity among them, and even more its spiritual life."

Archbishop Runcie, primate of the Anglican Church, wrote: *"I unite with the heads of other Churches in congratulating the Focolare Movement on the 25th anniversary of Centro Uno. My wish is that the Center and the entire Movement continue to flourish in its call to the love and unity of Christ."*

A glance back in time, leads us to the moment when the Focolare Movement "discovered" itself to be ecumenical. Let's look at how that happened.

In 1960 Chiara spoke to a group of Lutheran sisters in Germany about the Focolare. Several Lutheran ministers were present as well. They reacted in surprise, "What? Are Catholics living the Gospel?" It was the beginning of our ongoing relationship. The Lutherans were interested in hearing about the Gospel put into practice in everyday life and the Catholics in their love for prayer. The spirituality of the Focolare fostered a jump in quality in the personal effort of living Scripture which now both Catholics and Lutherans wanted to live together.

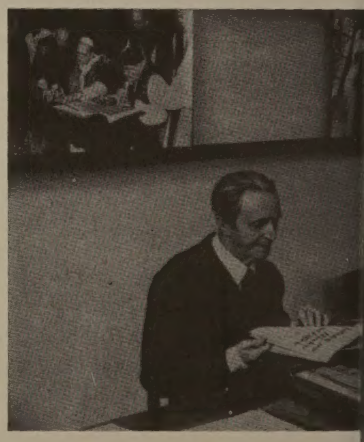
This was an exciting new turn of events. At Centro Uno in Rome there still exists a note from an appointment book marking the birth date of the Center at nearly the same time: *"Mutual love is the will of God. For this reason it is necessary that we love one another in order to suture the break. It is necessary to maintain in Christians the awareness of the problem of unity while the Council is being prepared. We do not know when there will be another one. It is essential therefore to work now. For the time being, in Tor Sanguigna Square, offices will be set up. We will start by collecting news items and articles."*

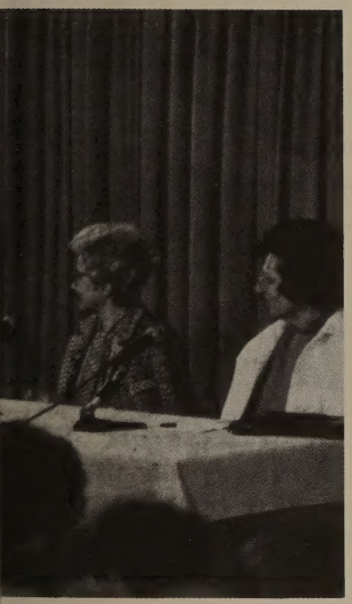
At the time of starting Centro Uno, Chiara indicated which areas to start focusing on: keep abreast of ecumenical journals in several languages, study in greater depth certain subjects, write articles, maintain contacts.

Later on, in 1965, several Anglicans who participated in a meeting of Lutherans and Catholics promoted by Centro Uno concluded: "Why can't we live this life together with you?"

Groups of Evangelicals, Lutherans and Catholics from Germany and Anglicans and Catholics in England discovered that they were brothers and sisters, they were "Christians" not only because of Baptism but also through mutual love. They recognized the possibility, and the richness that could be found in living together the Gospel from the viewpoint of the last prayer of Jesus, specifically the spirit of the Focolare, unity. This would be the way to help bring about full communion between their respective Churches.

April '86 - Over the years forty-seven ecumenical conferences have been held in Rome. The 45th one with 220 people coming from twenty-five countries saw twelve Churches represented. There were members of 7 patriarchates and Churches of the Orthodox Church, three of the Ancient Oriental Churches (Coptic, Syrian Orthodox, and Ethiopian) the Catholic Church, Anglican Church, the Church of Ireland, the Methodist Church and others. "To seek unity by living the Word of God" was the conference title. The them





(photo page 3)
April 2, 1986. An audience in St. Peter's Square during the 45th ecumenical conference promoted by Centro Uno.
(top) Chiara Lubich, founder of the Focolare Movement, during an ecumenical conference. At the microphone is Frere Max Thurian from Taize who brought the greetings of Emilio Castro, the secretary general of the World Council of Churches.
(left) Igino Giordani in his office at Centro Uno in 1974. He directed the ecumenical secretariat of the Movement from 1961 to 1980.

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coincidentally recalled the initial spark in the ecumenism of the Focolare in 1960.

"We considered ourselves good Christians but we didn't put the Gospel into practice" Chiara Lubich commented in her address referring to the lives of the early members of the Movement before 1943. "We began by taking a sentence at a time and conscientiously and with great energy put it into practice. A revolution started: the revolution of the Gospel. All our relationships changed: our relationship with God and neighbor. The Christian community blossomed around us. It was the newborn Focolare Movement beginning to take its first steps. An Anglican priest once said that the Focolare Movement was born as a living spring of water from the Gospel. People who up to then were strangers now became brothers and sisters to the point of sharing their spiritual and material goods. It was understood that the Gospel offered the possibility of a different kind of Christianity from what was lived up to that point. It was a Christianity which appeared to be dynamic, attractive, positive, always new. It made us reach out toward our neighbor, toward everyone in the world."

That weeklong gathering focused on the Word in its most varied aspects. Anglican Bishop Kenneth Pillar presented a talk on "The Gospel and the Anglican Church," Greek Orthodox Bishop Gennadios of Cratea spoke on "The Word of God according to the Fathers in the Orthodox Churches." Later in an interview with the Vatican Radio Bishop Gennadios commented, "The experience of living the Word of God together (at the meeting) made the reality of unity tangible."

Then the Gospel was examined in relationship to society by Tommaso Sorgi, to the family by Anna Maria and Danilo Zanzucchi, to the field of ecumenism by Gabri Fallacara, to the dialogue with members of the major religions by Natalia Dallapicolla. Experiences and brief testimonies given by persons from Italy, Switzerland and Brazil were quite impressive.

A particularly beautiful moment in the program was the audience with the Pope on April 2. At the conclusion the Holy Father called the four bishops from the different Churches to give the blessing with him and other Catholic bishops.

In the Catacombs of Domitilla, an ecumenical service drawn from the rich eastern tradition as well as the western, was celebrated in ten different languages underscoring unity in diversity, a characteristic of the conference.

A gift from the Orthodox participants was a splendid ancient song to the Mother of God. Also the Anglican Eucharist was celebrated.

Cardinal Willebrands, president of the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity, participated along with two colleagues and illustrated the ecclesiology of "koinonia" in Vatican II and it's implications for ecumenism.

There was great interest and lively participation among all. One ecumenist said, "Bishops, theologians, professors, priests and laymen and women, all together in mutual love. It is a sign. I was impressed to find so great an ecumenical openness in such a context. There was a special atmosphere."

April '86 - Immediately afterward the 46th conference sponsored by Centro Uno took place. One hundred sixty participants of the Reformed and ►

Catholic Churches from Switzerland met. The theme was the same.

Bishop Alberto Ablondi, president of the Secretariat for Ecumenism and Inter-religious Affairs in the Italian Bishops' Conference participated in the Conference and spoke extemporaneously on the effects of the Bible in the world and on the importance of collaboration in making it known.

Frere Max Thurian from Taize, France gave the main address on "The Word of God in the Reformed Church," while Chiara Lubich spoke on the experience of the Focolare Movement in living the Word.

Father Stjepan Schmidt, who for many years worked with Cardinal Augustine Bea, spoke of the work being carried on by the various ecumenical commissions. He underscored the fact that "the accomplishment of unity will in the end be primarily the work of the Holy Spirit. In order for God to give his unity, great humility will be required of all Christians."

Among the impressions was that of Peter Dettwiller, a Reformed minister, "I think that through the Focolare Movement I have learned to love my Church more. I rediscovered my Church and I found a much closer relationship to the Catholic Church. I always held the Catholic Church in esteem but then I can say I began to love it."

Someone else said, "Since I am Reformed I always seemed to feel like an outsider and every gathering between Catholics and Reformed presented difficulties for me. Now I have understood that before being Reformed or Catholic it is necessary to be Christian, to live as a Christian. I want to become more involved in my Church now."

Points of dialogue were clarified, prejudices fell, new hope and trust in unity was born. A couple from the Reformed Church said, "Here practice and theory are one and the same thing." Another couple commented, "We want the Word to be the root of our lives."

May '86 - The 47th Conference with 135 Evangelicals and Catholics from Germany and six from France gathered from May 20th to the 24th. The Lutheran understanding of the Word of God as presented by an Evangelical minister, Traugott Richter, was very interesting. Chiara Lubich spoke also at this conference and Cardinal Willebrands gave a broad panoramic view of the Word of God. "Here," he said, "lies the foundation of the entire ecumenical movement."

Many of the participants had been living the spirituality of the Focolare for years.

One person said, "I saw the theme of our conference fulfilled, 'The Word of God: the way to unity,' and I want to communicate it to everyone I know." Another: "I understood that the Word has to be lived and not only thought about. By living the Word we will reach unity among the Churches because we will all be drawing closer to God." Sentiments of this kind from Catholics and Lutherans will last and mark a new path.

It is impossible at this point not to think back to the beginning of the Focolare Movement in 1943. It was very much in syntony with Vatican II's Decree on Ecumenism: "The more they strive to live according to the Gospel, the more they are fostering and even practicing Christian Unity."

In our contacts with the Orthodox Patriarchs, both Athenagoras I and Demetrios I, and with the primates of the Church of England from Archbishops Ramsey to Runcie—this aspect was always emphasized. Dr. Runcie in an extemporaneous speech last November 19 gave an accurate analysis of the ecumenicity of the Movement and said: "You have demonstrated that it is possible to live together, work together and at the same time fulfill your obligations to your own Church.... This life together also demonstrates that all kinds of barriers, of misunderstandings, of useless obstacles, can be eliminated." And again on that occasion he further noted,"The Word of God always *does* something. You have found that the life of the Word unites you. This is very important.... The story of the Movement is one of the great Christian stories of this half-century." □

FAMILY LIFE

Weakened family life is one of the greatest social ills of our time.
The "New Family" Movement has as its aim to bring the Focolare spirit of unity into family life, so that each family will be deeply united within itself and with other families.

THE CHALLENGE OF A SPECIAL MOMENT: TEENAGERS TAKE THEIR TURN

Part VII

We conclude our series of interviews on how parents meet the challenge presented by their teenage children, this time letting the teenagers respond. Their world is complex. It is a time in which they sort out and test the values passed on to them and they often find it difficult to communicate across the expanse of a generation.
Living City asked several teenagers who try to live the spirituality of the Focolare Movement as Gen[1] to share their experiences.

compiled by Phyllis Scaringe

"Being a teenager for a few years now, I know how difficult adolescence can be. I experience so many new feelings, my moods can change from one moment to the next. A lot of times, I want to be more independent. I want to be able to do what I want but at the same time I know I need my parent's support. I have new fears, too, fears of rejection, and fears of failing. I have new hopes: a hope for a promising future and a hope to become the best person I am called to be.

Trying to live as a Gen, has been a big gift especially now and to live the Gospel with the other people of the Movement (teenagers and adults) helps me to always go a step ahead on the holy journey of life.

I am the only Gen in my school, and many young people my age are caught up in their feelings and feel confused and don't know where to turn.

I made a pact with Jesus to try to love them by listening to their problems, or even just to give an encouraging smile. Many of my friends find it easier to talk to someone their own age about certain problems. One day, on the school bus, I was listening to a particular friend of mine share some of her feelings on a certain topic and I shared my feelings about what was right. Suddenly, she smiled at me and said, 'You know, you're the only friend I have that really understands me and takes me seriously.' I felt a special joy in my heart because I knew she had felt Jesus' love through me.

"Over the past year my family has been going through a financial crisis. This insecurity has been hard on all of us but particularly on my dad. He is a calm and understanding person but I know it has been hard for him not to be able to provide for us the simple things we were accustomed to in the past. Many times I feel helpless, frustrated and afraid that our situation won't get better. I try to embrace this suffering and continue to love and believe in God's love for us. Sometimes I ►

realize I am worrying about my little things and I try not to bother him with them, or ask him for money unless it's something that is really important.

"It can be very difficult at school because I am so sensitive to my friends talking about buying new clothes, going on vacations, and things like that.

"The words of Scripture that I try to live together with the Gen give me the strength each day to wake up and say my *yes* to God certain that this is somehow a part of his plan of love."

"I first met the Gen when I was about ten years old,"says a young man from Long Island.

"My family was invited to a Mariapolis by a friend. I remember when I got to the Mariapolis I was fascinated with the fact that there were so many people from all over the country and Canada. This was my first realization that the world was so big and yet so small.

"At this age I was wild and the Mariapolis was just a vacation to me. I took advantage of the fact that we were a large group of kids. During group meetings I would find a few friends to cause trouble with.

"After the Mariapolis my parents became active in the Focolare and sent me to weekly meetings with the kids who went with us to the Mariapolis. I went primarily because my parents wanted me to go and I had fun being with the guys I hung out with at the Mariapolis. When we got together in sharing groups I wouldn't pay attention to what anybody said and I caused a lot of problems for the leaders of our group. For about four years I continued to go but eventually I decided that I was getting older and it was no longer for me.

"I started high school, played drums in a rock band and hung around with kids who did drugs. Throughout high school I got into all sorts of trouble. I was suspended from school more than once, I fought with other students, my grades were low and I was giving my parents a hard time.

"They insisted I go to church on Sunday. Maybe they hoped that some kind of miracle would happen to make me a good kid. When we went to church I would sit in the back with my other friends who were also forced to go. I wasn't happy to be there but there were times when a priest would say something that I found interesting.

"In my senior year of high school things started getting out of hand. I had tried all sorts of drugs and at one point I started to drink, too. I spent most of my days drunk or high or both. Towards the end of the school year I only had four classes and for that reason I got out early. I would start the school day drunk, come home around noon and pass out and sleep until 6:00 p.m. Then I would go out and continue the cycle. One day I came home from school and everything spun around me as I lay on my bed. I asked myself what was the purpose of my life. Graduation was coming and here I was with no job possibilities or college prospects. My parents had told me that if I didn't find a job or go to school I would have to find myself another place to live.

"Out of sheer desperation or lack of any other hope, I remember praying to Jesus and asking him if there was something better for me, to show me what it was. The instant I stopped praying my mother told me that someone was on the phone for me from the Focolare. It had been about four years since I was last in contact with them. The person calling told me that they were planning a weekend retreat over Easter vacation. I told him I didn't think I would go but that I would call him back to let him

know for sure. After I hung up I thought over the fact that I had prayed to Jesus asking him to show me something. Could this retreat be it?

"I went, and it was a very beautiful weekend. I was deeply moved by it. I guess I was older now and more ready to understand some of the things they spoke about. I saw how I could live them. By the time I left I had decided to straighten out my life.

"I was a little hesitant at first but I started getting involved in some of the activities of the Gen. Slowly but surely all the things I had heard when I was younger began to make sense. I was soon trying to do everything possible to make life better for myself, my family and others. It hasn't been easy but now I can see that the struggles I went through prepared me to realize who I was and what God wanted for me. I know that it was all for a purpose and a part of where I am now. I can not imagine what my life would be like had I continued the way I was going during high school. I've received so many fruits and blessings since I decided to live for Jesus and every day is a new and divine adventure."

"During my last spring break I was really looking forward to the idea that I could actually relax." We are in Chicago now and the experience is recounted by a sixteen year old young woman. "That was until my parents told me that we were going to remodel our kitchen. Right then I felt that I would not get to do the things I had planned and this disappointed me. I decided, though, that I would forget my ideas and do what my parents had asked us to do.

"At first everyone in the family was enthusiastic and ready to work. Our first attempt at painting the walls was a disaster and this made my parents upset. Right away there were disagreements over how it should be done. There were a lot of ideas but no agreements. Tempers were flying and no one wanted to help anymore. I knew my parents were disappointed because they really wanted the kitchen done. At first my selfish side came out; I decided that I wasn't going to help unless my brothers and sisters did. Even more, I would finally have a chance to do the things I had originally planned.

"The thought wouldn't leave me, though, that someone had to be the first to start over and I knew this was my chance to love my parents and my brothers and sisters. I started again to work even if no one else did. I did it out of love. Then I realized that the kitchen was really a mess with painting materials and newspaper scattered around. I saw this as another opportunity to love and I put the kitchen in order. Then I left and came back to find that my brothers had started painting again but had made a mess. I got angry because I felt they were taking advantage of me. Since I am the youngest they probably thought I would not mind cleaning up again. I told myself that I had promised to be like Mary in serving God and this was one way I could do it. I felt such a big joy inside of me even if it meant cleaning up the kitchen three times a day. It made it so much easier to love everyone keeping this promise in mind. Little by little everyone started helping again. We even went to the store all together to pick out the tiles and wallpaper we wanted. We finished the kitchen with unity.

By the end of spring break I felt as if I had really grown inside because I had made it to love no matter what the consequences were."

"It was the day of my high school graduation"—thus starts another experience from the Midwest—"and I expected gifts►

and things because graduation is an important event in our family. My two sisters who had graduated before me received tons of gifts and had parties. After the ceremony we got caught in a downpour while we looked for the car in the huge parking lot. When we got home —completely drenched in our best clothes—everyone was tired and there was nothing special to eat or celebrate with in the house except a gallon of generic ice cream. I kept thinking, 'They are not going to let my graduation pass by like this, are they?' Afterward my dad wrote out a check for $50.00 and gave it to me. I felt sorry for myself. A check seemed so cold and impersonal. I would have preferred a pair of drum sticks that cost three dollars but at least would have been meaningful for me.

"A week later we were to go on vacation all together by driving out to the west coast. I was still hurt and depressed and not getting along with anyone. Before we left my father asked me to study the map so that I could navigate the car. I told myself I wasn't going to do it but I did anyway out of love for my family. On the second day we stopped into a small Spanish style church for Mass. It was very beautiful inside. There was a statue of Mary that I looked at and I told myself that I had to be like Mary and say *yes* to the hurts that were bothering me in order to love and keep peace. After that our trip went smoothly and everyone got along.

"With our imperfections, though, we lost this unity many times because everyone wanted to do their own things. Some wanted to go to Disneyland, others to Beverly Hills and our unity fell apart. I became my old self again and complained about everything. I gave up trying to maintain this peace. It wasn't until we went to Las Vegas—of all places—that I noticed everyone was helping each other again. You would expect that because of the heat everyone would be crabby but it was the opposite. We joked and sang and had a great time. I guess it was because we were now headed back home. We all realized it was probably our last trip as a family. We started singing a song that had a refrain, 'We can start again' and start again we did. Everyone forgot all the little wars we had with each other and was maintaining unity.

"When we got closer to home my parents talked about how happy they were to have raised us. After my parents spoke I thought what a great gift this trip had been for all of us, a much better gift than I could ever have expected for my graduation. It was the gift of a family so close to each other and to God."

"I remember the day that I realized what a commitment it would be to be a Gen." It is a young woman speaking about her realization that she needs to love always, at school and at work, if she wants to make it to be loving at home.

"I remember being afraid. But then I knew it was the only way I wanted to live. It's not easy. Sometimes I have to say *no* to my friends and risk being seen as someone who is not "cool." I fail but I know I can always start again because God always sees me new."

An experience: "In high school I worked at an ice cream parlor after classes. One of the girls I worked with didn't seem to like me so I tried to find ways to love her even if she felt like that about me. For example, someone had to mop the floors and of course neither one of us wanted to do it. I tried to mop them right away. Little by little she responded. One day she felt free enough to ask to talk something over with me.

"She told me she was afraid she was pregnant. She was sixteen years old and not at all

ready to be a mother. I understood it wasn't for me to judge her but to help her by making her problem my own. I listened to everything she had to tell me. She saw her plans to go to college, her future now ruined. Her solution was to have an abortion. It was clear to me that abortion is wrong but how I could help her accept that, I did not know. I didn't want her to feel judged but since she was asking for my advice I told her that we cannot take life into our own hands. I was able to talk to her about other alternatives and assure her of my willingness to help in whatever way she needed. She was so relieved. Up to then she had thought that abortion was her only way out but she now felt that abortion would not be the solution. A few days later she came to tell me she had found out she was not pregnant. She thanked me for caring and for giving her a new way of thinking."

Also another gen feels she has to be such at all times.

"At 7:30 this morning I started a job as a waitress. I was scared because I was the only waitress there. I made the coffee wrong and people got aggravated. I thought to myself, "It's not my fault, nobody was here to teach me the right way." I wanted to tell the people who were upset how I felt but then I thought, "This is Jesus Forsaken,[2] I have to love him and go beyond my pride."

Sometimes these little things seem like nothing but they hurt a lot. When I love Jesus Forsaken in the suffering that comes to me I feel free and happy. It helps me to go on and get over the things that hurt me."

□

1) "Gen" stands for "new generation," the youth of the Focolare Movement. The Gen try to live the Gospel message of love and share with other youth the conviction that the Gospel is the answer; 2) Refers to Jesus on the cross when he cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

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LOVE IS STRONGER

The Sudden Laceration
Part II

Lazarus Come Out, *a book that many of our readers know well since it was published by New City Press was the autobiography of Matteo Silvan. It was the interesting story of a married man deeply immersed and interested in the secular world, the story of a focolarino.* **Love Is Stronger,** *his new book, starts where the other ended, with the death of Teresa, his wife, and with the beginning of a new chapter in his life.* **Living City** *will publish it in installments.*

by Matteo Silvan

Neither alone nor a widower

The community at large of the Focolare in Rome gathered around me, my family and friends, who had come even from far away, as soon as the news of Teresa's death was known. Yet our coming together had a special meaning. It was not the usual expression of sympathy. All seemed to want to reassure us of their concern and their love. Surrounded as I was by so many caring people I almost did not feel the enormous emptiness that was making its way into my life. Obviously the supernatural bond uniting us was so strong as to fill the emptiness left by natural love.

The house was filled with people, and my grandson Francesco always stood at my side. When he saw a lady who used to come very often to visit Teresa, he asked her, "Now that grandma is not here any more, will you still come to visit grandpa who is going to be all alone?" The woman hesitated for a moment, then answered evasively.

The thought that I would remain alone flashed before me. It had not occurred to me before.

Francesco, however, was persistent in his concern for me. When he saw a young student of medicine coming towards me, a young man who used to spend more time at our house than at his, he repeated his question. "Giovanni, will you still come now that grandma is not here anymore?" The fellow lowered his head, and left without answering.

This episode opened my eyes onto the reality of my life. In our home Teresa—as a woman, as a spouse, as a mother—had been everything. Without her, our home did not exist anymore.

That afternoon Chiara Lubich called me on the phone. I remember only the sense of her words together with the love, the tenderness of a mother for a child, and even more. She said among other things that there would be a place in the cemetery of Rocca di Papa where many of the people in the Movement rest, also for Teresa. Emotion got the better of me and I could only say, "Thank you, thank you."

The time for the funeral was set at three in the afternoon of the following day. At dawn, as I lay awake in my bed, I remembered those words: bring Teresa up to Rocca. Teresa would have a place ... and I?

Suddenly all was clear. I got up and wrote to Chiara that not only would I like to bring

The community of the focolare of Rome outside St. Hippolytus Church. (right) Matteo with Father Foresi.

Teresa up to Rocca, but also what was left of me, because in reality I felt I was neither alone nor a widower. Teresa had left for a journey which I myself would soon take. Meanwhile, if I were accepted, I was ready to live in any one of the "focolare households" and give my life to God so that his love might burn me, purify me.

Someone offered to hand deliver my letter, so with great peace in my heart I went out to see the pastor who was supposed to officiate at the funeral. The word funeral seemed absurd to use in this case.

As soon as the pastor saw me, he came to greet me and offer his sympathy. I thanked him, but I immediately added that, for me, Teresa had only left for paradise. And I wished that the funeral would be a special one. "Don't speak of death—I told him—but of the Resurrection. The community of the "focolare" in Rome will be present and we will all sing as if it were a Sunday mass."

He looked at me a little puzzled, puzzled at the idea that I was inviting him to celebrate a feast through the liturgy of the funeral. Yet he agreed to do what I said because he knew me and my wife well. For twenty years we had been attending Mass there every day.

"In paradise with you"

The funeral was, in reality, a solemn rite celebrating the passage of a person from the world of evil existing on this side, to the world of the living on the other. The large church of St. Hippolytus was full. A group of young women, accompanied by guitars, sang as if it were a celebration:

"Flower of Israel ...
Your love invites me to paradise
to be in paradise with you ...
You, star of my journey, you the Immaculate ...
In paradise with you."

I followed the words of the song mentally, without being able to stop my tears. Many around me, deeply touched, were singing and crying.

A dear friend of mine told me as we were leaving the church, "Thank you, thank you. It was like being at the mass of Holy Thursday."

I looked at her a little surprised. Then I understood. That person had really focused on the meaning of the Christian funeral: an event in which the passion, death and resurrection are one sublime and divine reality.

Suffering, in fact, had been overcome by the love existing among us that was supporting everyone. I felt I was living in a dimension that had little to do with the earth. This gave me the certainty that I was still united with Teresa.

From Rome we went to Rocca di Papa for the burial. Before reaching the cemetery, however, we stopped at the Mariapolis Center for one last encounter with our closest friends. When I reached the hall, the casket was already in place in the center of the room. It was covered with flowers. But our "closest friends," to my great surprise were hundreds. Wherever I turned my eyes I saw faces looking at me with smiles of sincere concern.

Then suddenly I saw Chiara coming in from the doorway. ►

She went straight to Teresa knelt down and kissed the casket. Then she saw me and came towards me, hands outstreched. She told me, "I received your letter, and my answer is 'Yes with all my heart'."

Too much was happening and I was too moved to be able to say many words. "Thank you," was all I could utter, but I would have liked to add, "Yes, thank you, thank you with all my heart and for the rest of my life."

The ceremony started. A dear friend who is a priest, and who knew Teresa well, went through the steps of her spiritual journey. He concluded his brief talk reading excerpts from letters that she had written to Chiara in recent years.

They were new to me, yet, as he proceeded, I realized that in them there was all of Teresa's soul.... They revealed her own particular and secret relationship with God. It was something I had never imagined.

My heart was now pounding. Yet, in front of the casket, surrounded by my friends, I had to stand straight. The rite proceeded, and concluded with Benediction. Then up we went, all together, towards the cemetery of Rocca.

The time had arrived for me to leave that which had been my treasure on earth. One last blessing and again the song, *"In paradise with you, in paradise with you ..."*

The sun was warm, like a balm soothing my eyes so red and tired. "It is beautiful to die like this," I thought.

Solemn, deep moments at the Mariapolis Center in Rocca di Pap

You also cried

Before going back to Rome, I asked my priest friend to give me Teresa's letters. He couldn't say no. I put them in my pocket and proceeded out with the others, resisting the temptation to start reading them right away. This would not be the moment.

When I reached home, and everyone had left, while my daughters completed some of the practical things and said the last goodbyes, I withdrew to my room.

My God ... that empty bed in front of me. I closed my eyes so as not to look at it.

Immediately, however, I found new strength. I took a deep breath and finally, almost shaking, I opened Teresa's letters. As I began to read them the emotion took hold of me again and I couldn't help crying. But I went ahead reading, realizing once more that here it was not a matter of personal relationships, but of the secret work of God in a soul. Therefore, since "the works of God are to be declared and made known,"[1] I felt it was my duty to share the essential parts of those letters.

The first one was written in October 1973 to Chiara who was just recovering from a serious and painful illness. Here it is:

I'm very happy to know that you are better and that your convalescence is proceeding well. I wanted to tell you that I love you now more than ever, and that I have always been close to you. Your illness, your suffering of these days has brought me closer to you.

Before, I saw you exclusively and essentially as a human being totally belonging to God, almost detached from the earth. I thought that your suffering, united to that of others, had been sort of sublimated by you and that it had nothing more of that human element which is common to us. But when I heard that you also suffered physically, that you cried like any other person and were not afraid to say it, that you also experienced fear and pain, that you loved us as your children, knowing that we love you and believe in you and want you among us, then I felt that you were what I wished you would be for us, for me, a sister, a mother, incredibly close to me.

(above) In the first row are: Father Foresi, Matteo, Igino Giordani, Chiara Lubich, and Chiara Silvi Colucci.

I too have suffered much both physically and spiritually, but I always kept everything inside and for the longest time. Part was because of pride, and part so as not to sadden others when I felt they couldn't have helped me anyway. Then I understood that not only the beautiful things, but also sufferings, can be offered for myself and for others. I understood that I should not hold everything inside.

I was always helped by Mary: in the past but also now. Mary, too, after her yes, and because of it, accepted everything that happened. I like to think that perhaps also Mary, even though she always "stood," might have cried many tears.

Now, I don't believe that I've become too good, or that I have grown so much, but I try in my everyday life to live the will of God, moment by moment. I try to improve always, by loving those who are next to me, especially the "least ones" (I know many...). Oftentimes it costs me greatly to do so.

I wanted to thank you for having sent Lucia to spend a few days at home, all for us, before she returned to New York.. It was a wonderful week. For the first time I felt that I was "my daughter's daughter", with great unity and great affection. It was a breath of the divine that will ease the suffering of having her live so far.

I'm happy for her and for myself. I see her so happy and transparent that I experience within me a great sense of awe; and I pray for America, for you and for the whole Movement. I love you and I wish you the best of health.

The second letter I had in my hands was written two years later, June 1975. Teresa was not well. The episodes of her hemorrhaging had become more frequent. Many times we had to take her by ambulance to the emergency room of the hospital. She had no illusions about getting better, yet she continued to love and lived in great serenity. She kept her suffering to herself. I remember her saying every once in a while, "Trees die standing."

Dearest Chiara,

With great serenity, but facing an uncertain future because of my health, I have recognized and embraced Jesus Forsaken and his mother, Mary Desolate. I want you to know that I am offering everything, and I pray for you, for the whole Movement and for the Church.

You spoke to us about the hard part of the Gospel. Willing or unwilling I have had to live it in its fullness. Day by day its impact in my life wears away the unessential in order to bring me closer to being living word; in imitation of Mary, the "word fully lived."

In these past days it has often come to my mind: 'What you are doing, do it well, as if it were your last day....'

I'm happy! I experience how true it is that, if I accept and offer up my suffering, I experience joy and also the fruit of the pruning. I am certain that in all these trials there is a plan of God for us and I want to add my little tile to the mosaic.

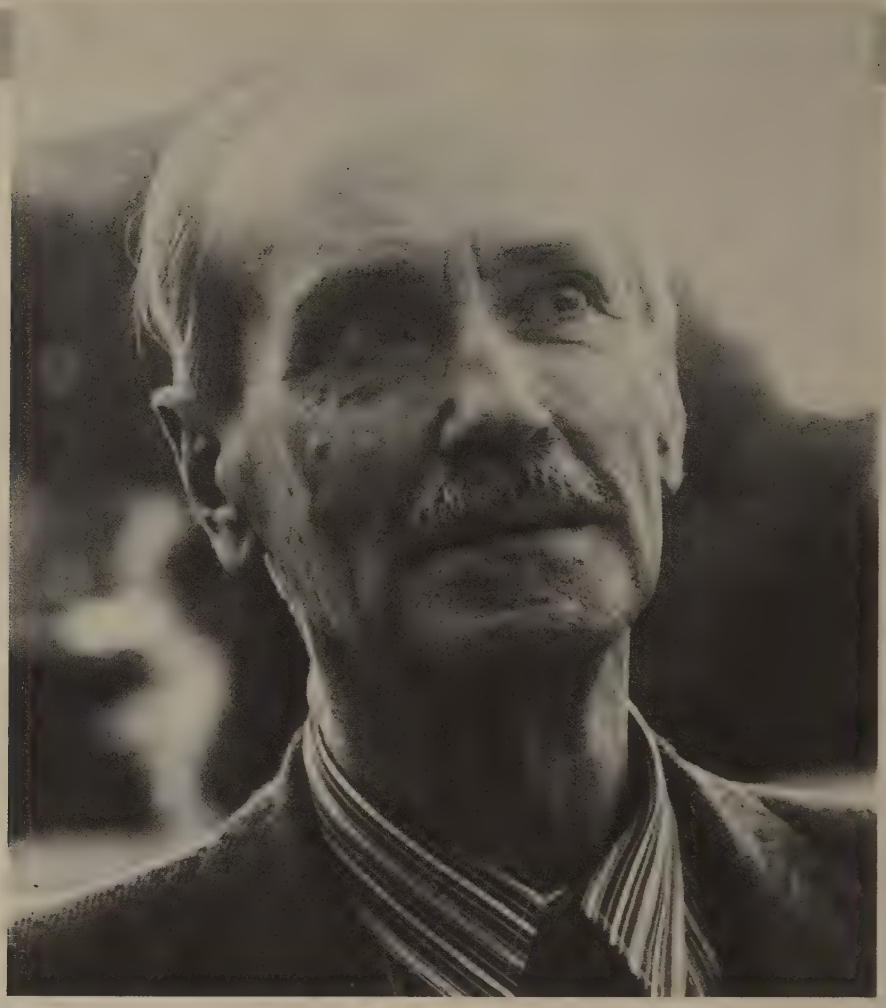
I thank you for remembering me, for your prayers and your concern. I will continue to pray, always hoping to improve, as I proceed along the road towards sanctity, a road that seems to become shorter and steeper.

In perfect unity ...

I had to stop. How many thoughts now clouded my mind. What a strange torment this was! I experienced in fact a sense of infinite consolation in discovering what a treasure Teresa possessed. At the same time, however, I was pained by the thought that I had lived with her for forty-six years without fully understanding her.

Why and how could this happen?

(Continued on page 26)



Lessons learned from a friend

Aldo Gadotti
a laymen for our times.

by P. Quartana

"To experience the life of the Gospel is an extraordinary adventure, full of surprises. It is like when you go mountain climbing. You reach a peak and contemplating the beautiful panorama you think it is the best human eyes can possibly enjoy. Then as you continue to climb you discover always more stupendous sights. Take it from me, you never tire of it." Aldo and I were walking along a narrow mountain path in the Dolomites as he shared these thoughts with me. There could not have been a better backdrop. We had just met. I can still recall those moments which were going to be so important in my life. I found his conviction and enthusiasm contagious. He had experienced what he was saying and he was speaking like a solid, mature, level-headed person, certainly not inclined to be carried away by his imagination.

We worked together since then for most of the past thirty years. We were like brothers, different in age and background, but nevertheless so united in working toward a common goal. I guess we were travelling together on a journey that went through many peaks, and saw many splendid panoramas but also suffered through some severe storms. Over the years my first impression of him proved to be correct.

Aldo was cut out of the rocks of his mountains. He was strong, and his life seemed to have been cut out for his nature. After a very comfortable childhood, as a consequence of a financial setback in

his family, he began, at the age of thirteen, to work hauling a carriage of ironware, summer and winter through the streets of the city. The social imbalance he witnessed around him, spurred on by his sense of justice and concern for the defenseless, led to his involvement in the leftist labor movement. At that time he practiced no religion. Only three Hail Mary's would he say every night as if to maintain the link with his mother who had taught him to do so when still a child.

"When Aldo said *yes* he meant *yes* and when he said, he *no* he meant *no*. People who lived and worked with him say he was like that, straightforward, at home and at work. He was the same with God. It was through his encounter with the newly born Focolare Movement, in 1948, that he discovered God who is Love. He was consequent and firm in the decision of following him in a very concrete way. "I never spoke about my new life"—he would say—"even though people who knew me noticed the change in me." He, in fact, started by "doing," i.e. "living" the words of the Gospel rediscovered as a book of life. "I learned many little things by attentively watching the results of the life of the Gospel. I saw hurts of every kind healed, I saw people paralyzed by suffering take up life again and find hope, I saw people who had been far from God, run to him. All this happened because a group of persons were living united in God's name. I too, wished to give my life so that all would be one, Christ's last prayer fulfilled,

(across page) One of Aldo's last photos. In this year dedicated to looking more deeply into the role of the laity, his life stands out all the more. (above) With two of his three children. Aldo was a dedicated family man.

and life "on earth, as it is in heaven...."

He joined the Focolare in order to serve the Church through this Movement. It was service given without reservation. In 1956 his organizational and managerial experience and skills, his human and spiritual maturity led to his move to Rome, where he could make his contribution at the Center of the Movement. It was the fulfillment of a dream. Aldo had asked himself in the past if the total availability that he saw in the single focolarini who left city, country and occupation for the kingdom of God wasn't also meant for him, a married man with a family. Now the opportunity had come for him to do the same. "I talked it over with my wife," he said. " Her *yes* was her expression of love for me. The company did not want to let me go. They offered me a year's leave of absence in case I changed my mind. It was an extraordinary gesture and certainly not in the contract. I accepted the leave to make them happy but I knew I would not return.

I packed my bags and left for Rome. The family followed in a couple of months, as long as it would take me to find a house for them. A new adventure had begun."

It was an example that was to be followed by other families moving to different countries throughout the world to assist the Movement and serve the Church and society.

From this point on, Aldo assumed one task after another without stopping, working at ►

Aldo here seen with Igino Giordani with whom he collaborated from the beginning in the development of the Movement and in service to the Church.

the side of Chiara Lubich, the foundress, and her closest collaborators Father Foresi, Igino Giordani and others. I can recall, in particular, his work for Citta' Nuova, the publishing house of the Focolare and his work for over ten years as director of the printing house. As I walk through the press and bindery rooms, employees from those times tell me, "We owe in great part to Aldo the fact that we have a job today." He went through very difficult times at the beginning. Head on he met every difficulty and didn't give up until it was taken care of. He was always fair, a model of honesty and integrity. He could be stern but he was first of all strict with himself. He made no compromises." "He was a bombshell," one person told me; "For me he was a friend, a father and brother," said another.

He helped everyone to do their best because he was able to intelligently and warmly give his attention to each person's problems. He was the person to whom many often turned when their were problems to be taken care of, and not only at the press.

I then came to know Aldo well over the many years we worked together for the married focolarini and the New Family Movement. He brought the experience of someone who was among the first to feel the fascination of giving one's life totally to God as a married focolarino.

I remember them as years which built a deep bond between us and with others. I say that because Aldo, who seemed to be capable of doing everything on his own both in practical and spiritual matters, had chosen communion, unity. In order to reach holiness he wanted to live with the Holy One, Christ among us, whose presence is attained and kept alive by mutual love and he made himself one even with those who were insecure, weak, immature, unstable ... in order to entrust himself to the love of the Father with them. It would have been in his nature to seek a deep and personal relationship with God however he chose to go through his brothers and sisters and approach the Father together with them.

I remember an episode. While he and his wife Alma were already living in Rome, their third child, Antonio, was born with a heart defect. Aldo was travelling when the child unexpectedly died. "I was able to contain my grief" he wrote in a diary notation from the day. "I was told about what had taken place in my several hours of absence. When the doctor informed my wife of the gravity of the situation, Antonio, who had already been baptized, was confirmed. A thought went through my mind: "You were given a son and now you have returned him rich in two sacraments: a complete Christian." In the middle of my anguish "there was a moment of deep joy."

I learned a lot from the way he loved his children. He gave them good example and advice but left them free to make their own choices even if he didn't always agree. From Aldo I learned how to face sickness and death.

In February of 1980, while helping a passerby in trouble, Aldo tripped and fell. "I broke my thighbone," he wrote to a gathering of focolarini from the hospital, "and ever since then I always have this phrase in mind: 'God loves you immensely.' Even in difficult moments—and there have been some—this sentence has helped me to

believe that everthing that has happened and will happen in my life is God's love."

At the end of the same year he was hospitalized in Padua for difficult and delicate surgery. He was sustained by living the "present moment." "If the world only knew how much intelligence lies in this, many would repeat, 'For today, today's troubles are enough,'[1] he told us.

In 1982 after another hospitalization, during which he underwent an additional emergency operation, his condition appeared hopeless. Aldo felt he had to accept the suffering as a participation in that of Christ crucified and forsaken. He wanted to do it out of love for Christ alone, even if it meant to be in pain for all the time he had left. Chiara Lubich sent him this message: "... I know you could not go to your mountains in Trent because of your health. I am certain, however, that you are climbing an important mountain in the company of Jesus Forsaken. We are all close to you, so that the Risen Lord may be among us and beside you, even if we are not together...."

At home during the final months he tried to carry his illness without weighing on his family and especially Alma his wife who told us of the dedication and faithfulness that distinguished their lives together. She shared all the phases of his illness with him day by day.

"He got up every morning, even with fever, dressed himself and sat at the table with us, " she told me. "One day while he was trying particularly hard to force himself to eat, I realized he was worse than usual. I told him: 'Aldo, take your temperature.' Reluctantly he agreed. It was 103°. He let me call the doctor." "As much as possible, he tried not to worry us," Agostino, a friend who was very close to him in the last months, told me. "It was Aldo's style: a generous, unselfish love."

On his last day, he got up out of bed but passed out and fell. When he returned to consciousness he received the Eucharist and then awaited the end with his eyes wide open.

Between one prayer and another, Alma, in an effort to determine if he was still conscious, asked him: "If you love me, close your eyes, if you can." Aldo, immediately but with great effort, closed them. It was his last act of love.

□

1) *Mt 6:34.*

With a group of families during a gathering at Rocca di Papa. Piero Pasolini, physicist, and one of the first focolarini is seen bending down. Spartaco Lucarini, carrying a child on his shoulders, and several others who worked closely with Aldo at the Center of the Movement particularly on behalf of the married focolarini, one of the most original vocations within the Focolare.

magnificat: a model self-help community

A united community of fieldworkers in the Amazon region of Brazil emerges from the ravages of a flood and continues to draw an always wider circle of attention as a model self-help community.

The protagonists of this story—at first 130 families but now 160—are field hands, a widow (the land-owner), an heiress, a sociologist, a handful of people with innovative principles, courageous ideas and consistent behavior and many persons spread here and there all over Brazil and even the globe.

The location is the large rural area of Barriguda in the Amazon region, which as we know from school, has an equatorial climate. The closest town is ten miles away. To get there you can walk, take a canoe... or catch the boat that passes once a day.

Let us go back in time to the beginning of our story. The families of field workers who lived there, or better, barely eked out a subsistance there are spread out in little agglomerates over the expanse of land. Their ancestors lived there since time immemorial. The situation was similar to that of many other agricultural areas of Brazil. The people had their roots in this soil. They worked the land with their hands. It was a continual quest to keep the land clear and free from overgrowth. They grew beans, rice, corn, tropical plants, coconut and some banana. They still do.

The harvest was barely enough to feed them and because of the rudimentary implements, the quality was poor. Insufficient as it was the farmers were obliged to trade or sell part of their produce for other essentials like clothing. Formal education did not exist in any shape or form and they had little knowledge of rules of hygiene. Drinkable water was near inexistent; there were no wells. They lived in mud huts covered with palm leaves which the rain would nearly demolish every season. There was no electricity and therefore no electric lighting.

The most serious problem though resulted from the fact that the field workers did not own the land they worked. In general the land was owned by landlords who left it largely uncultivated. Some landlords did not even ask for rent from the field hands who had over the years settled on the land.

At one point though a law was passed in an effort to help these settlers. A great struggle for agrarian reform has been going on all over Brazil in an effort to hold back the flight from the fields to the cities and all the chaos that accompanies it. The new law states that farmers who have been living on and cultivating land for at least five years and can give documented proof of it, become the land's owners.

As you can imagine this caused the landlords to try to sell the plots of land and do all in their power to chase the settlers off their property so that they could not expropriate it. The result was that to the hunger and sickness of the poor were now added all too often threats and violence of all kinds.

A group of fieldworkers at Magnificat. Everone takes turns working the others' land.

This was the general picture. Right in Barriguda, however, something very different was taking place. A widow, by the name of Maria de Rosario, was a landholder of 5981 acres. We can say about her at this point that her own life as a Christian was being renewed and that along with many others she was experiencing the beauty and fruitfulness of every word of the Gospel uncompromisingly put into practice.

She was the first link in a chain of events joining an always greater number of persons. In common they had a great faith in God who is Love and the conviction, rather the certainty, that this love can concretely reach every person through the lives of his or her neighbors. In common they had the experience of being the object of others' love and the givers of this love to others.

It is in this township, that a community called "Magnificat" was established in 1979. They called it Magnificat because the words, " He has deposed the mighty from their thrones and raised the lowly to high places. The hungry he has given every good thing, while the rich he has sent empty away,"[1] seemed so full of meaning and appropriate to their situation.

In June of 1984, Maria de Jesus Nascimento, a sociologist who has lived in Magnificat from the onset of the project and Joca Nonato Alves, a farmer who was elected president of the settler's assembly, went to Italy. *(See Living City vol.24 n.4)* There at the first international Congress on "Economy and Work in the Christian vision" sponsored by the New Humanity Movement of the Focolare, they presented the story of them all. Even then in 1984, the projects and accomplishments they related were impressive. However, what has taken place since then, is even more relevant and interesting.

In the box, we outline the major steps that marked the way of what has been an endeavor of self-help on economic, social and human levels of the people of Magnificat from the beginning. Here we will limit ourselves to the events of the last year.

In November of 1985 the people of Magnificat worked their land with their new equipment obtained through the funds set aside in the seed bank which they themselves instituted. They sowed using their system of helping one another in turns. Their expenses were covered, they paid back loans, for the use of the tractor, for fuel, for seeds and fertilizers. Everything pointed toward a bountiful harvest. They were looking forward to the new improvements they would be able to make with the proceeds, like the fund they were planning to set up for various kinds of social assistance.

But in March there was a terrible flood. A real phenomenon. Not since 1924 had there been anything quite like it. Most of the homes and fields of Magnificat were inundated. The flood waters did not recede until May and left desolation and destruction behind. The harvest was completely lost yet the farmers did not give up. They refused to fatalistically resign themselves to the events.

The experience of living as a family over the past years continued to bear fruit. By canoe they went to seek each other out one by one, wading through the roads and fields which had become lakes and rivers. They gathered together in the few homes which were on high ground and they shared food and their few resources. The government made great efforts to help them but perhaps the greatest source of strength was the realization that many all over the country were with ►

them and were interested in their plight. Perhaps it was the contributions on a smaller scale than that of the government but nevertheless a sign of a wide range sharing that came from the heart that was deeply felt.

Last June, Maria de Jesus went to the meeting in Rome of the International Bureau of Economy and Work to which she belongs and brought the latest news, enlarging the circle of solidarity wider still.

Work down there is going at full speed. The people are re-seeding, re-planting. The farmers houses and other structures for community use are being re-built in areas of higher ground and with break walls as a protection against every eventuality. The tile and brick workshops, recently put into operation, came in quite handy. They are studying—with the technicians of the New Humanity Movement as well as those the government is providing—new systems for channeling water and for irrigation.

There is an old proverb that says "Not all evil is intended to be harmful" but the inhabitants of Magnificat may not even know it. Instead many of them repeat: "It was a painful, trying experience but beautiful just the same. It made visible the fraternity, the sense of community that we have developed."

Mariele and Pino

1) Luke 1:52-53.

A scene of the flood after the rains stopped. The fieldworkers went to look for and help one another.

Steps Along the Way

1979 - *Maria de Rosario Bogea, left a widow, must sell 5981 acres of land in a place called Barriguda. To avoid sending away the settlers on the land, she freely gives them 1038 acres. The farmers, however, are spread out all over the terrain and cannot be uprooted from their fields and homes.*
- In the meantime members of the New Humanity Movement begin to visit the farmers. Good relationships develop with a growing member of families.
- Later on a person of the Movement receives an inheritance that she wants to give to the poor. Maria de Rosario sells this person the 4,943 acres of land that she still owns for one fourth of its value. In this way the entire plot of land passes over to the farmers.

1980 - January. *The inhabitants of Barriguda meet regularly to help one another to live the Gospel, even under their difficult circumstances. Maria de Jesus Nascimento, a sociologist, leaves her home, family and city and moves into a hut just like the others in Barriguda. Later on, a teacher and social worker join her.*
- The first well is dug in order to obtain drinking water.
August - *Families come together as a community after meeting in order to pray together. They now decide to work together as well. They begin the construction of the "Community Center" that will serve as church, school, meeting hall and dispensary.*
1981 - January 4. *The official beginning of the "Community of Magnificat" is celebrated. The sector of New Humanity entrusted with the task of coordinating the work of development of the area acquires juridical recognition under the title of "Sercom" (Community Service).*

1982-83 - *The "Community Work Group" begins. No longer does each person work only his or her own piece of land but everyone takes turns working the land of everyone. If someone becomes sick, the others carry on the work and the sick person receives compensation just the same. However, if someone misses work without justification, his compensation is put into the "Fund for the Common Good." This "Common Good Fund" provides for the needs and projects of the community and one third of the proceeds of production regularly goes into it.*

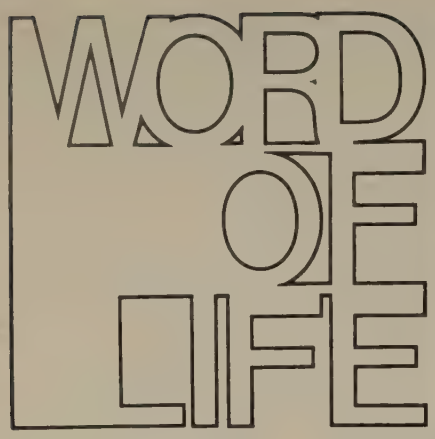
1984 - *A tractor is rented to deforest twenty acres of land and a rice plantation is begun.*
- *A "Seed Bank" is opened where two percent of the harvest is deposited. Now the community of Magnificat offers seed even to neighboring groups in difficulty.*
- *A small local market is started where merchandise can be exchanged or sold and by so doing other kinds of goods not produced by the community can be acquired. The profits, upon deliberation by the assembly are put into the Common Good Fund.*
- *God with his "providence" is present to them in many ways. A Catholic organization "Misereor" allocates an annual contribution to the Community of Magnificat and a German priest who, after visiting northern Brazil to distribute funds collected by his parish, donates $8,000.00.*
- *Great strides are made. A board of managers is formed by several farmers and the general assembly has reached the maturity of self-government. All decisions are made together.*
- *The farming community of Magnificat under the name "Association of Workers of the Magnificat Community" attains juridical status.*
- *Storehouses are built for the products to be conserved and a place where the rice can be dried. Farmers donate their time for these projects.*
- *Schools and a kindergarten are set up at Magnificat at the expense of the township. There are 280 children who go to school with four rural teachers plus one for the grammar school and two for the kindergarten paid for by the township and the government.*
- *Technical assistance from the government for the development of small scale farming is made available to Magnificat. An agronomics engineer (Agronomics deals with field-crop production and soil management) from the government organization makes a precious technical contribution. This engineer, who now has become a part of New Humanity, brought four other technicians to Barriguda to coordinate the work of the government agency in the entire region and to duplicate the experience of Magnificat in other farm areas.*
- *The government agency, impressed by the work and achievements of such a united community establishes to take on the expenses for the work of preparation of over 100 acres of land. However, the group of farmers who have been working together for four years decide to use only part of the land and to divide the rest between one group of settlers living nearby and another located on the other side of the river. Not only. The farmers of Magnificat even donate the seed for these new plantations. "We have received," they say "now we want to give."*

What all these people have in common is the conviction that the love of God can reach every human being through people who live as brothers and sisters....

1985 - *They experience the "Give and it shall be given you" of the Gospel. Another government agency for the assistance of small farms which had provided seed under the contract term that the amount would be returned at harvest time, ultimately declared it unnecessary.*
- *Through the government Magnificat obtains the use of an irrigation pump.*
- *A sewing group is set up with a workshop so as to provide the basic clothing necessities. The products are then sold to the local population at affordable prices. The proceeds become the capital for the further development of the sewing group.*
- *Ground is broken for seven new wells and each of the eight agglomerates of people has its own.*
- **April.** *The community is in a position to sell rice grown at Magnificat at the market of the township.*
- **May.** *A threshing machine is donated. This improves rice production and prices.*

1986 - *A small factory for tiles and bricks is gotten under way. In this case, too, one third of production is used to erect buildings needed by the community.*
- **January.** *The farmers of Magnificat give a presentation to the inhabitants of fifteen villages sharing their journey in living the Gospel, their growing as a community, their sharing and joint participation.*
- *The board of managers draws up a very important document defining everyone's rights.*
- **March.** *A representative of the board together with a technical adviser and a counsellor of the township meet in the State Capitol with the agency for agricultural programs.*
- *The agronomist from the government presents Magnificat as a model experiment to the regional government council.*
- *The community of Magnificat presents to the Superintendant for the development of north-east Brazil "a project to further the production and commercialization of basic agricultural products."*
- *The land is flooded. Disaster unexpectedly opens the way to a bright future prospective.*

□



"If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones."

(1 Pt 3:17)

"If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones."

The apostle Peter directed these words to the Christian communities of Asia Minor which were undergoing a period of difficulty that arose not as a result of persecution (a large scale persecution would break out a few years later) but rather because of ridicule, criticism, mistreatment, calumnies, discrimination, that Christians suffered at the hands of their fellow citizens who were pagans.

For those who had recently been converted and were not yet strong in the faith, these hostile expressions, especially when spread out over a period of time, posed a dangerous threat because they could lead the newly formed converts to discouragement and to the abandonment of their new life.

The apostle therefore wanted to prepare the Christian communities to face this temptation, helping them to understand the meaning of such a trial.

"If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones."

When we begin to live the Gospel, it is inevitable that sooner or later we will encounter the opposition of the world. Jesus himself said it, affirming that indeed it was a sign that we belonged to him. In fact, he called especially blessed those who suffer persecution: "Blest are you when they insult you and persecute you and utter every kind of slander against you because of me" (Mt 5:11).

Jesus also gave us the explanation of this opposition when he told his apostles, "They will harry you as they harried me" (Jn 15:20).

The fact remains that there is a radical, unbreachable incompatibility between Jesus and the world. The world cannot accept Jesus and therefore it rejects also those who want to follow him (cf. Jn 15:19).

"If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones."

Furthermore, it is also better to suffer for good deeds than for evil ones because one's faith is tested and strengthened by these very difficulties and persecutions. Here lies the proof of how much the disciple understands and loves his Master. Jesus wants to see if we are able to follow him even when the world is against us.

Also, in allowing persecution, Jesus is telling us that the message of the Gospel penetrates the world not so much through easy acceptance and human support as through the witness we give and the suffering we are able to bear for him.

"If it should be God's will that you suffer, it is better to do so for good deeds than for evil ones."

This word of life, therefore, reminds us that there is a trial that Christians as such must face, that is, that the world will not understand.

We cannot deceive ourselves. The fact that we live in an age of greater freedom and progress will not exempt the Christian from this kind of trial.

People may accuse us, for example, of being old fashioned because we still believe in the truths of our faith, because we try to live according to the commandments of Jesus, because we follow the teaching authority of the Church. At first, this may cause us to suffer.

Yet it is in these very moments that we can show Jesus that we love him.

Take courage then! It is not very easy to follow Jesus, but it is worth it to suffer a little for him because the joy that comes from following him surpasses all others.

Chiara Lubich

EXPERIENCES

The following are experiences in living the Gospel which some of our readers shared with us.

The new car

Recently we reached the point that a new car was a necessity. I, of course, wanted a car with all the options, while my wife's main concern was the cost. I tempted myself by looking at every model we couldn't afford. However, when I finally went to a dealership, I found a car that was a model I wanted —minus many of the options— but meeting the financial guidelines my wife was looking for.

The only problem, however, was that the car was mustard colored, something I'd never normally buy. Furthermore, it had hale damage. Nevertheless, I decided to buy this car. The deal was made.

After a couple of days, I phoned the dealership to see when we could pick it up. The salesman informed me that it had been sold to someone else. I was so angry that I really hit bottom. I told him that at 6:00 p.m. I would be in his lot. I wanted to speak to his boss.

All the way there, I planned what I would say and do. I was ready, if necessary, to take them to court. Finally, as I turned into the dealership, I realized that even this salesman was my neighbor. No matter what he or the dealership had done, I had to love him. The whole situation became for me an expression of the Word of Life: "I say to everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt 5:22).

When I went in, I tried to be totally empty of my anger, resolving that I would love, no matter what. I greeted the salesman with a big smile. He, of course, was taken aback, expecting one irate customer. He apologized and was very humble saying that they had but one car left to substitute the one they had sold. We went out on the lot to see it. It was so much more than I had expected, with some of the options I had given up! It had no hale damage and even the color was appealing!

D. M.

More family than family

The holidays this year, found us many miles from our family. It was an adjustment for me. We are a close family with six children and twelve grandchildren. Try as I wanted to feel otherwise, reports on TV and oft-repeated articles on holiday "depression" crept into my consciousness. I remembered another time—many years ago—being immersed in another family which resulted in an overwhelming homesickness for our own children. In no way did I want a repeat of that. So, when a good friend telephoned and invited us to her home for the holiday dinner I did not respond with my usual enthusiasm. She overlooked it and immediately assumed I would come. She was happily filled with the anticipation of having all of her children home for the occasion. She was setting a table for twenty—we would be the only non-family. I was even surprised at my own response because I truly love her children and had watched them grow up. But the feeling persisted. The following day another couple invited us to their home and their dinner would include no children. This, I felt would be much better for my frame of mind—but certainly not fair to the one who extended the first invitation. I declined. But defenses are hard to break and I immediately sent an invitation to a friend of mine who had recently buried her mother. That, I thought, would be our "out". However, my friend could not make it. I had no other choice. November's Word was, "Let us then cast off the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (Rom 13:12). I was certainly armored in darkness and had to ask myself if the life I had chosen could get me through the holidays away from home. The light came with the realization that there was Jesus in each person in that home that I could love. I called my friend immediately to find out what I could bring for our dinner. It was a splendid day for me with not even a hint of "depression."There was such a consciousness of Jesus as I interacted with each person. Often in the past—with our own family—we slip into famil- ►

iar roles and the relationship I seek is not there. You can imagine my joy when the next day my friend said that one of her children remarked that my husband and I were more family than family. For me, it was as if Jesus felt my love.

M.L.

Our anniversary

On a Friday evening I planned a special dinner to celebrate our wedding anniversary. It seemed all the more important to me since my husband and I have different work schedules and rarely do we have time together.

Instead of coming home at 6:00 p.m. though as he had said, my husband's boss asked him to work overtime. His boss even wanted him to work on Sunday which was the day of our anniversary and for which we had already made plans. At 10:00 p.m. he called to say he still wasn't finished.

I was so upset that I thought of going to the office to tell his boss off but something within me told me I should read the Word of Life instead. I did. The words were just for me. "I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment" (Mt. 5:22). I had to change my attitude. I immediately went back to prepare the dinner even better and resolved not to be angry with my husband or his boss.

When my husband finally arrived I welcomed him with a smile and told him that if he had to work on Sunday, he could. He wanted to know why I had changed. I showed him the Word of Life. The peace it brought between us was beautiful.

On Sunday he came home earlier than expected and we were able to still keep some of the plans we had made. Now we are in two to live the Word of Life.

J.K.

(Continued from page 15)

Love and Pain

The house was still immersed in silence. No one came to my room. Perhaps they thought I was resting. On the contrary. I was there trying to find an answer to my whys.

I tried among other things to make a profound examination of conscience, but I reached contrasting results. It is true, I thought, that I had not succeeded in getting to know Teresa fully, but I don't know myself fully either. For this reason, on a human level we could never have been as close as we would have wanted. I was absorbed in the financial problems of the government; she was anchored to that instinctive depth of her being woman. It was inevitable that....

Yet, no! These were all excuses. They were not valid for me. I know that for many years I had loved this woman in a selfish way, only for myself, not for her. Than I tried to see her as God sees her, but I was superficial in doing that: I had not understood as yet—for example—that to love often implies knowing how to "let go" even of ones's point of view in order to accept that of the other. It seems to be such a little thing, and instead ... how difficult it is.

My eyes started to open exactly when I was supposed to keep them tightly closed under a dark bandage. It was 1962. I had been hospitalized for a detached retina and successive cataracts in both eyes. I had to undergo surgery many times. For five long months Teresa stood by me, day and night, always ready to intervene at the slightest sign of need. Then, yes then, I felt her close to me.

Our two daughters were far away, one in New York, the other in Pakistan on an archeological mission. Teresa refused to inform them of the situation: she felt she could take care of everything herself. She slept on an uncomfortable couch placed close to my bed so that every time I touched her with my hand she could give me hers. And I rejoiced as a child who has found the hand of his mother.

Her silence in that period was not a burden for me. She was like that guardian angel that

(Continued on page 28)

MARIAPOLIS 1987

SOUTHWEST:	Las Cruces State University Las Cruces, New Mexico June 28, after supper - July 4, after breakfast
NORTHWEST:	Northwestern University Nelson, B.C., Canada July 5, after supper - July 11, after breakfast
MIDWEST:	Hope College Holland, Michigan July 12, after supper - July 18, after breakfast
EAST COAST:	Mariapolis Luminosa Hyde Park, New York July 19, after supper - July 25, after breakfast
EASTERN CANADA:	Carleton University Ottawa, Canada July 19 after supper - July 25 after breakfast

The Mariapolis gatherings are the summer meetings of the Focolare, held every year, for those who wish to come into contact with it.

For one week the Mariapolis offers to hundreds of people of all ages and walks of life a very full program that includes general sessions with talks on the spirituality of unity, sharing of experiences in living this spirituality, documentaries, meetings in small sharing groups and recreational programs. The Mariapolis is a time for prayer and recollection. The celebration of the Eucharist is at the center of each day and all participants gather together at the conclusion of the activities for evening prayer.

Children have separate activities which involve them in the life of the Mariapolis through various spiritual and recreational programs. Special programs are available for teenagers as well.

The week, however, is more than the sum of its parts. It is an experience of how life, also every day life, can be transformed if love and unity are its foundation. When the Mariapolis ends, people find that it was not only a tremendously enjoyable week, but they have experienced a way of living that they will be able to bring back home.

Mariapolis Luminosa
Hyde Park, New York

July 26 including supper -
August 9, after lunch

Space is very limited.
If you are interested in attending please contact the Focolare Center nearest you.
(See inside back cover for addresses)

(Continued from page 26)
you don't see but is always at your side. And like an angel she was, always present, vigilant, ready. Few words were really necessary. She would read to me books and magazines. I discovered her sensitivity and her love for me as I listened to what she would say of me to others, to the visitors who were always numerous.

Teresa was aware of her difficulty in opening up with me. Speaking of her illness, in her first letter that I just mentioned, she confessed it openly: "I always kept everything inside, for the longest time: part was because of pride, and part was so as not to sadden the others...."

But I knew that it was not a matter of pride. Rather I would say that there are sentiments, in the depth of our soul where God dwells, that can be expressed only through monosyllables, through imperceptible, indefinable signs. That day, what came to my mind was a meditation by Chiara Lubich entitled "Two secrets": *"There are two things that I must keep secret: love and suffering. For love is the love with which He loves me, or loves Himself in me, and suffering is the love with which I love him. The light—which is a fruit of that suffering and love—must be shared with others."*[2]

Now it was clear. But how could I even imagine that a love so deep lived in her? Because I could see that Teresa shared light. She did it through facts and not through words and I found it hard to understand....

An enclosed garden, a fountain sealed

"The light must be shared with others." The light that comes from above calls for more light. As I pondered this thought I seemed to understand Teresa as a person full of light. It seemed to me, I dare say, to find in her some features of that ideal Spouse that the "Song of Songs"describes.

I felt a sudden desire to look for the lines that I had in mind. In a second I found my bible and began looking through it ... and finally I found it:

"O my dove in the clefts of the rock,
in the secret recesses of the cliff,
Let me see you,
let me hear your voice ...
You are an enclosed garden, my sister, my bride,
an enclosed garden, a fountain sealed."[3]

I'll never forget how many times I read those lines while it seemed my heart was bursting. That was the real Teresa, now I recognized her!

A sense of indescribable joy pervaded me.... It seemed that heaven was open, and I lost myself in that joy.

But it didn't last too long. The telephone rang. Would it be for me? I waited for someone to tap at the door, but nobody came. I realized that it was now dark. The sense of the reality around me came over me again. I had to go and be with my daughters. They looked at me with some surprise. I guess it was because I was smiling.

On my desk I found a lot of mail, letters and cables. I went through all of them. Many wrote what they had already told me. But among them, a letter, a page with only a few sentences, made me stop:

Rome, April 19, 1977

Dear all,

I want to extend to you the most affectionate and the most serene condolences. For Teresa, I sing the Magnificat. A woman like her who had made of her family a church, and of her dwelling with others a liturgy, could not but be holy.

United in prayer, I formulate all the best wishes of paradise, for that great soul who now dwells in your hearts, uniting you to the Lord in heaven.

Most affectionately,
Igino Giordani

Dear, dearest Giordani! He can only see paradise. How could he think of expressing his condolences by singing the Magnificat? How could he see in our home a family where, like in a liturgy, everything is sacred, every word has significance and every gesture meaning? It is overwhelming and yet understandable. The passing of years has led Giordani to the conquest of simplicity, or better, to the re-conquest of innocence. And he, looking at people through the eyes of the Creator, is able to penetrate beyond appearances and perceive the divine that is present in the depths of the human heart.

(to be continued)

1) Tb 12:7; 2) "Meditations" by Chiara Lubich, New City Press, New York 1974, 3) Sg. 2:14, 4:12.

What is the Focolare Movement?

THE BEGINNINGS

FOCOLARE means "hearth," "family fireside." What first strikes people when they come in contact with members of the Focolare, whether in small groups or in large gatherings, is the atmosphere of a family. It is a family formed by many different people in various walks of life. The Focolare Movement is also known as the "Work of Mary." Under this name it was approved by Pope John XXIII in 1962.

The Focolare Movement began in 1943 in Italy. In the midst of the terrible destruction of World War II, Chiara Lubich realized that God is the only one worth living for. As a result, she began to center her life on the Gospel, together with a small group of young women who followed her. Their ideal became one of striving toward the fulfillment of Jesus' last prayer to the Father: "May they all be one" (Jn.17:21).

The life of Chiara and her first companions, and the spiritual way they spontaneously followed, gave rise to the unique form of spirituality of the Focolare Movement, a spirituality of unity. It has proved to be a powerful means of introducing the Gospel into modern life, of going to God together.

WHO ARE THE FOCOLARINI

Single men and women live in separate communities called Focolare Centers. Their principal aim is to achieve unity among themselves through mutual charity practiced twenty-four hours a day. They follow the evangelical counsels of poverty, chastity and obedience. They work as other laymen and women in regular jobs and professions.

Some married persons, even though continuing to live in their families, participate fully in the life of either the men's or women's Focolare Centers in their common effort to achieve this same unity. They are called "Married Focolarini" and form the backbone of a vast Movement within the Movement, called the New Family Movement.

THE VOLUNTEERS AND THE NEW HUMANITY MOVEMENT

The Volunteers, also called the "Volunteers of God," are a large group within the Focolare Movement; they would like to transform all human realities according to the Gospel spirit. The Volunteers are the backbone of the mass movement called New Humanity. The aim of this Movement is to help form a society made of men and women who are made "new" by the Gospel message and who can then bring new life to all fields of human activity (education, business, etc.). This results in new social relationships which, in turn, lead to the realization of new structures of society.

GEN

The new generations of the Focolare Movement form another Movement or, better, three movements: the Gen 2, the Gen 3 and the Gen 4 Movements, divided according to their various age groups. "Gen" stands for new generation. The Gen have committed themselves to living the Gospel message of love and to sharing with other youth the conviction they have that the Gospel is the answer to every question and the motive for everything they do.

THE MOVEMENT AMONG THE RELIGIOUS

Men and women religious — although they live according to their own rules and constitutions and are already a distinct part of the Church through their religious families — can also be associated with the Focolare.

Contact with the Movement helps them to focus their attention on the specific charism of their founders, and to see how it can be lived in the present time.

PRIESTS — PRIESTS' MOVEMENT —SEMINARIANS — PARISH MOVEMENT

Many diocesan priests are committed to living the spirituality of the Focolare Movement. Some of them live in community. They form the backbone of the Priests' Movement which is made up of priests who live the spirituality of unity.

FOCOLARE FAMILY

The largest group within the Focolare Movement is made up of men, women and young people who are connected with the Movement without having any formal ties with it. Their bond of unity stems from their acceptance of its spirit and their desire to live it.

ECUMENISM

The Movement not only crossed the political boundaries of more than 100 countries, it has also gone beyond the barriers erected for centuries between the various Christian Churches.

Ecumenical activities take place in the different parts of the world where the Movement exists.

In the past few years a promising, ongoing dialogue has been established with faithful of other religions.

SUMMER MARIAPOLIS

Summer meetings are held every year for those interested in the Movement and for those who wish to come into contact with it. For one week persons of all ages and walks of life are exposed to the spirituality of unity. Above all, they strive to practice it by creating among themselves a rapport that molds them into a community. It is intended to be a basic experience of such intense unity that the people will be able to bring it back into their own environments. And this is the most striking fruit of these conventions. They tend to be models of a world which lives according the Gospel.

PERMANENT MARIAPOLIS

The need to prolong the experience of the summer meetings brought about the birth of small cities called Permanent Mariapolis. They are made up of young men and women, as well as whole families, who are there for a designated period of time to be formed according to the Gospel spirit of unity.

They also attend classes in Sacred Scripture, Theology and Sociology and work for their own support.

MARIAPOLIS CENTERS

In addition to the Permanent Mariapolis, there are Mariapolis Centers, which are training centers for the members of the Movement.

FOCOLARE ADDRESSES IN NORTH AMERICA

CHICAGO:
P.O. Box 53426
Chicago, IL 60653

SAN ANTONIO:
P.O. Box 32302
San Antonio. TX 78216

NEW YORK:
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New York, NY 10021

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P.O. Box 71701
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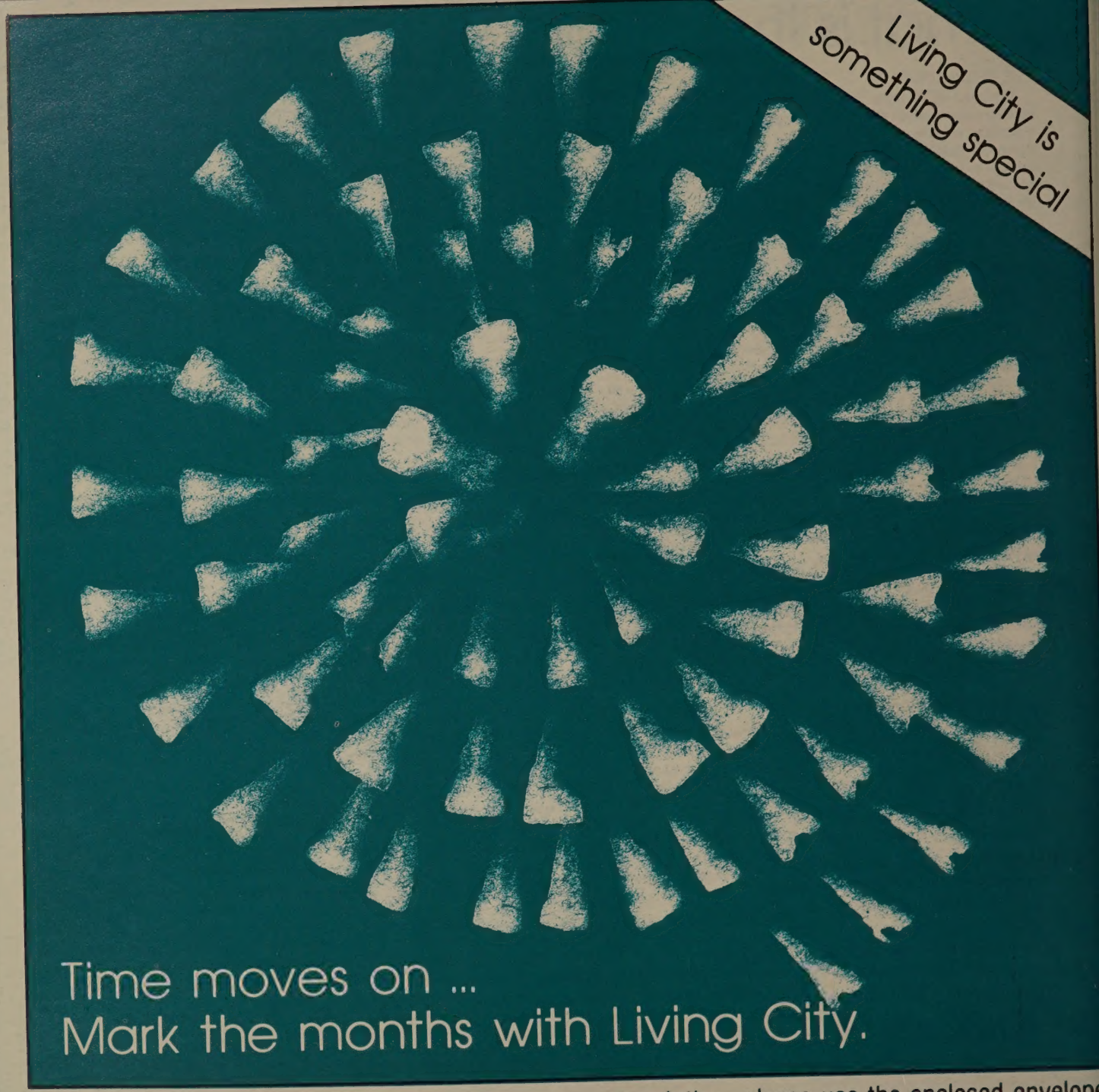

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